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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [VT](#) [BK](#) [BOSNIA AND HERCEGOVINA](#) [OSCE](#)

SUBJECT: OSCE BOSNIA HEAD PRESSES HOLY SEE AND FRANCISCANS  
ON MOSTAR TENSIONS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission D. Brent Hardt for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

1. (U) This telegram contains a guidance request. Please see paragraph 9.

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Summary  
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2. (C) OSCE Bosnia Head of Mission Robert Beecroft emphasized the importance of inter-ethnic reconciliation in Mostar for Bosnia's future stability during March 23-24 meetings with the Holy See's Foreign Minister and the Franciscan order's Minister General. Beecroft made it clear that Mostar-Duvno Bishop Peric and nationalist Mostar Franciscans had become a hindrance to progress in the city, and asked both officials for help in tempering the divisive influence of these Mostar Croats. Beecroft said a high-level visit from the Holy See and from the Franciscan Minister General to Mostar could enhance the credibility of the international community with the Mostar Croats, while simultaneously helping promote reconciliation and political progress. End Summary.

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Obstruction in Mostar  
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3. (C) In a meeting coordinated by the Embassy, OSCE Bosnia Head of Mission Robert Beecroft told Holy See FM Giovanni Lajolo that ethnic and religious reconciliation in Mostar was critical to the future of the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Unfortunately, Mostar-Duvno's Croatian nationalist Catholic Bishop Ratko Peric was proving to be a key impediment to reconciliation, Beecroft noted to Lajolo. In a follow-on meeting with Holy See BiH Country Director Joseph Marino, Beecroft was more blunt, making it clear that he regarded Peric as an obstructionist. Beecroft noted that Mostar's Croat politicians had gone so far as to tell him that they were getting their marching orders on education reform from Peric.

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Message of Reconciliation Needed  
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4. (C) Lajolo asked how the Holy See could help the OSCE's work in BiH, and Beecroft told him that the Church needed to spread a message of reconciliation through the Papal Nuncio and its bishops. Beecroft pointed out that he and the international community already enjoyed excellent cooperation with the Nuncio in Sarajevo and with BiH's Cardinal Vinko Puljic. However, Beecroft observed that BiH Croats needed to hear a consistent message from all Church authorities that their culture was not in danger and that the international community did not pose a threat to them. The Pope, who visited BiH in June 2003, has actively promoted reconciliation, telling Bosnians they had to "start afresh" and take to heart the "sentiments of forgiveness, of reconciliation, (and) of brotherhood." He visited Croatia the same month and made reference to "healing the wounds" of the "cruel war."

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Vatican Eyes Croat Interests  
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5. (C) Lajolo took Beecroft's request on board, but asked if the Croats weren't being asked to sacrifice too much in terms of political representation in Mostar. He and Marino also asked why Mostar was the only city with the particular formula it has for representation, with Marino noting that deviating from the principle of "one man one vote" was problematic. Beecroft explained that the High Representative's decision to prevent the formation of a majority block in the Mostar city council may seem unfair to Croats, but had become the only way forward after repeated failures to deal with what was a unique and critical situation. It was necessary for BiH to make broader political progress. Both Vatican officials expressed some

appreciation for the peculiarity of the Mostar situation. Though neither directly criticized Peric, they noted that Beecroft's concerns were not surprising, and they clearly received Beecroft's message about the bishop's obstructionism.

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Mostar Franciscans Unhelpful  
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16. (C) Beecroft brought a similar message to a March 24 meeting with Franciscan Minister General Jose Rodriguez Carballo, telling Rodriguez that despite good relations with the Franciscans in Sarajevo, many of their brethren in Mostar had "accepted the premise that education reform was a threat to Croat identity." Beecroft made it clear to the Minister General that the Mostar Franciscans' resistance to the international community and their "willful misunderstanding" of some of its initiatives was a roadblock to progress in the city.

17. (C) Rodriguez, who took over only recently as Minister General, seemed genuine in his desire to promote reconciliation in BiH. He noted the complicating factor that the Mostar Franciscans and those in Sarajevo comprised separate provinces of the order, and therefore fell under different provincial leadership. Rodriguez's deputy explained further that episcopal authority trumped that of the order -- the clear implication being that Peric was the stumbling block with the Franciscans as well. (Comment: Religious orders have in the past found ways to create some distance from their bishops when absolutely necessary, and the Franciscans could press for greater freedom from Peric. End Comment.) In any case, Rodriguez said he was planning a trip to the region in June and would consider what steps would be appropriate to address the situation.

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Comment and Guidance Request:  
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18. (C) If past experience is a guide, the Holy See will be reluctant to intervene directly with Peric. Marino has told us in the past that unless there is something theologically errant going on in a bishop's diocese, the Vatican is loath to micromanage it. Still, the Holy See has heard the same message on Peric for some time now, and with FM Lajolo at the helm, it is possible that the Holy See could consider finding some way to shift Peric to another diocese or a position within the Vatican.

19. (C) Technically, Mostar is "mission territory" and thus not under the normal hierarchical structures of the Catholic Church. As a result, Peric reports formally to the head of the Vatican Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, whose head, Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe will meet with the Ambassador on another matter in the coming days. Embassy will pass along word of Beecroft's perspective on Mostar to Sepe, and stands ready to convey any additional points on this matter that the Department considers appropriate. While we cannot predict what influence Sepe might be willing to wield in the matter, we believe it would be helpful to raise any U.S. concerns on Mostar with him to cover all relevant Vatican bases.

NICHOLSON

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